

# The Albany HERALD

By Pete Skiba  
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***Members of Foxtrot Company 148th Brigade Support Battalion accept a formal welcome home and then head for barbecue at the Veterans Of Foreign Wars Post 2785 Saturday.***

**ALBANY, GA** — Men and women dressed in National Guard green sat, stood, held children, kissed wives and husbands and smiled a lot — they made it home alive and well.

After nine months in Afghanistan the members of Foxtrot Company 148th Brigade Support Battalion were formally welcomed home 10 a.m. Saturday in the 1500 N. Monroe St. National Guard Armory.

Informally they met at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2785 at noon for barbecue chicken, hamburgers, hot dogs, beer and soft drinks courtesy the post's members.

"I'm just glad to be home," said 1st Sgt. Alfred Lewis, a lieutenant in the Albany Fire Department when not serving in the National Guard.

"We were in a completely foreign culture for months," Lewis said. "Being back home takes some adjustment to the freedom. I have to adapt to being able to walk to a convenience store to buy whatever I want, go to a movie when I want, all that."

The return home after months in a poor, war-torn country made more than one guardsman at the armory count even normally unattractive moments as pleasurable.

“Being home feels surreal. To hear my kids screaming as I sit in my recliner actually feels good,” said 1st Sgt. Sean Hannes. “I take it all in and it makes me feel good.”

Leah Smith, 12-year-old daughter of 1st Sgt. James Smith, probably spoke for all children, wives, husbands and significant others when she recounted how good it was to have her father home.

“I feel safe again. I feel safe for myself, my mom and my dad,” Leah said as tears filled her eyes. “I know I don’t have to worry about my dad when he is home.”

The formal “Welcome Home Celebration” at the 1500 N. Monroe St. National Guard Armory offered speeches from the Albany Area Chamber of Commerce representative through local elected officials.

Everyone from Leland Burkart of the chamber to Jeff Sinyard chair of the Dougherty County Commission to Willie Adams Jr., Albany mayor, to U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop, D-Albany, spoke to welcome the troops home after a job well done.

The job the 148th Brigade does is one of the unsung hero jobs that the military needs to fight the battles. The 148th supports infantry with supplies, equipment and other logistical duties, said Lt. Ana Collins.

This doesn’t mean that its members are absolved from combat. In war, no one is absolved.

Five members of the 148th received Combat Action Badges at the celebration. Childs and

Hannes did the honors to hand out the badges.

The five recipients were: Sgts. Anthony Mapp, Robert Terry and James Smith, Specialist First Class Dave Fulsom and Specialist Gregory Trice.

As Childs stepped down the line to shake the hands of the recipients and offer her “well done,” Hannes took the two-pronged badge put it on the recipient’s chest and smacked it with his hand. This drove the prongs into the recipients’ chest.

The pinch from the prongs for a first combat patch is a tradition just as is the deep throated Hoo-Hah the unit gave its commander when she took the stage.

Childs said that her support battalion had suffered no losses in this deployment. However the infantry unit it supported had lost eight to the enemy.

When Adams spoke he chose to honor those eight who would not come home to a celebration but to a funeral. He called for a final salute, to which the entire room snapped to attention and saluted the fallen comrades.

Bishop spoke of those the battalion had been deployed to defend and how those who have never fought for their country would never know what it means to those who have.

“For those who served, freedom has a flavor the protected will never know,” Bishop said. “You know what it means to put your lives on the line for something greater than ourselves, the defense of our freedom and our country.”

When the members of the 148th and their families followed an honor guard of more than 70 motorcycles to the VFW post for barbecue they were greeted by flag waving people at the entrance to the parking lot.

About 600 people packed into the VFW Post's main hall before the food was served. The three tour Vietnam War veteran who organized the barbecue spoke to the crowd.

“Back in the 60s, and 70s we all kind of laughed at the National Guard,” said Paul Murray. “We are not laughing any more. You were on the front lines.”